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NO 'PEACE AT ANY PRICE'

With the President ill, responsibility for foreign policy lies even more heavily in the hands of Secretary of State Dulles. Though Mr. Dulles will see Mr. Eisenhower for a short period, the President, nominally director of foreign policy, will not be able to give him other than the briefest counsel for weeks.

Yesterday in Miami Mr. Dulles gave a good account of himself. He declared "peace at any price" to be out of the question by reaffirming this country's intention to be strong. He let the "neutral" countries know exactly where they stand with the United States by saying that, "Barring exceptional cases, neutrality today is an obsolete concept. It is like asking each community to forego a police force and to leave it to each citizen to defend his own home with his own gun."

Russia remains a huge riddle; the world's largest power where secrecy is so ingrained that, as Mr. Dulles said, "We cannot tell whether what is now going on marks a genuine change of purpose or whether it is merely a maneuver."

In this regard the secretary's speech may be related to two other statements. In one Mr. Dulles' brother, Allen Dulles, gave this country's top intelligence appraisal of Soviet aims. The chief of the Central Intelligence Agency, he said Sunday that he saw "no change whatever" in Russian hopes to subvert the world for communism.

The other statement was a significant one by Nikita Khrushchev, secretary of the Communist party in the Soviet Union, nearly a month ago. Khrushchev warned the West, in words it would be foolish to take other than seriously, that anyone who expects the new Soviet goodwill to bring abandonment of Marx, Lenin and Engels "must wait until the shrimp learns to whistle."

At the time, few in the West were familiar as they might be with the whistling ability of shrimp. But we must assume that Mr. Khrushchev meant that very few shrimp whistle.

This means, and there has been no indication elsewhere to the contrary, that Moscow's aim still is a Communist world. Geneva, in the minds of many observers, brought a recognition of the futility of nuclear war. But Russia hopes to spread communism by other means.

Against this background Secretary Dulles' words, as he spoke to the American Legion convention, made hard sense. He hastened to say again that acceptance of President Eisenhower's aerial inspection and blueprint plan by Russia would do much toward further improving relations. He continued the moderate tone employed at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. But he expressed belief that, as in the case of Austria, world opinion eventually would force the Soviet Union to relax its grip on the areas of the world it now controls with an iron hand.

As James Reston notes in an article printed on this page today, events since Geneva have caused this country more concern than at any time since the Formosa crisis. It is a time for firming up, and for strong assertion of the leadership we cannot avoid.